



National Park Service
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Carlsbad Caverns
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Carlsbad Caverns News Release

For Immediate Release
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Wind Suspected Culprit in Bat Deaths at Caverns

On the morning of April 5, 106 dead Mexican free- tailed bats were found on the Natural Entrance trail in the upper end of Carlsbad Cavern's twilight zone. The bats were scattered along the trail and walls on two switchbacks in an area open to the night sky, piquing curiosity and begging the question, "What happened?"

While it cannot be known with absolute certainty, the most likely scenario is that strong wind gusts coupled with the unpredictable wind behavior around the cave entrance and cliffs pushed the bats down to the trail where their fragile bones were shattered. The bats did not appear to have suffered any major trauma, although some of them had received postmortem damage, probably from insects and ringtails.

According to the RAWS (remote automated weather station) weather station in Bat Cave Draw, wind gusts were between 48 and 55 mph from 8:45 the previous evening to 6:45 that morning, while the base wind speeds varied between 17 and 33 mph.

A visitor did report that he had been watching bats at the cave entrance the previous evening when he saw one bat get "picked- up" by the wind and "slammed" into the rock cliff. He said, "I even heard it go 'splat'." However, he said he only observed this happening to one bat.

Southeastern New Mexico has been experiencing long periods of strong wind gusts over the last few weeks. Last year, while the park received nearly double its average annual rainfall, several severe thunderstorms also hit the area. A late- summer thunderstorm left thousands of dead birds on the streets of the city of Carlsbad, 25 miles to the north. On September 20, 39 dead Mexican free- tailed bats were found under a tree next to the visitor center parking lot. There had been a thunderstorm the previous evening, and the bats probably tried to take refuge in the tree, but were caught in a downdraft.

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Carlsbad Cavern is home to nearly 300,000 Mexican free- tailed bats that roost in a passage about one- quarter mile from the cave's large natural entrance. A migratory species, the bats return in the spring to take advantage of the area's plentiful night- flying insects, their favorite food. From mid- May to mid- October, each evening's bat flight is preceded by a program that highlights the benefits of bats and their natural history.

- NPS-

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